DANGANRONPA FRIEND ZINE

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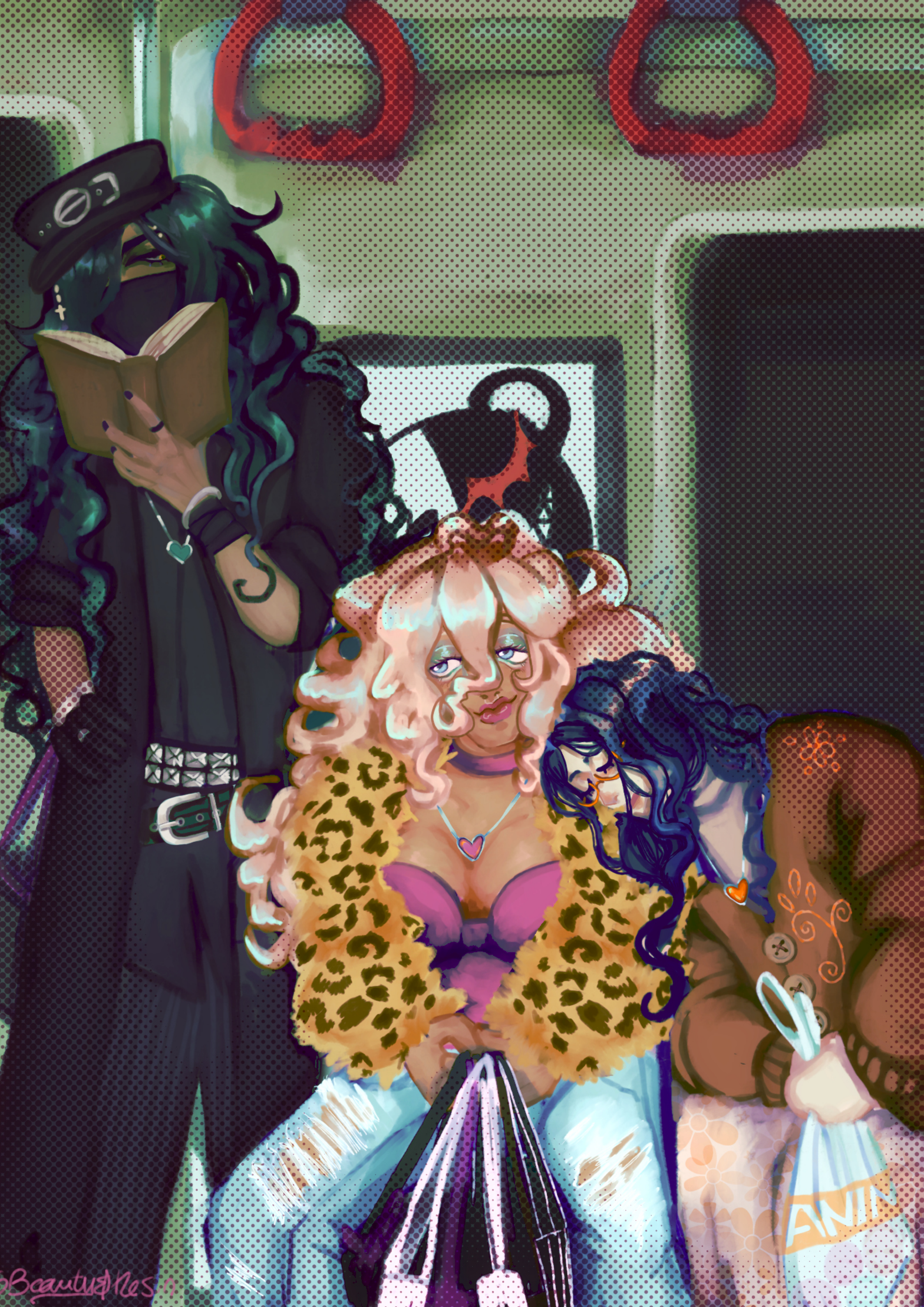
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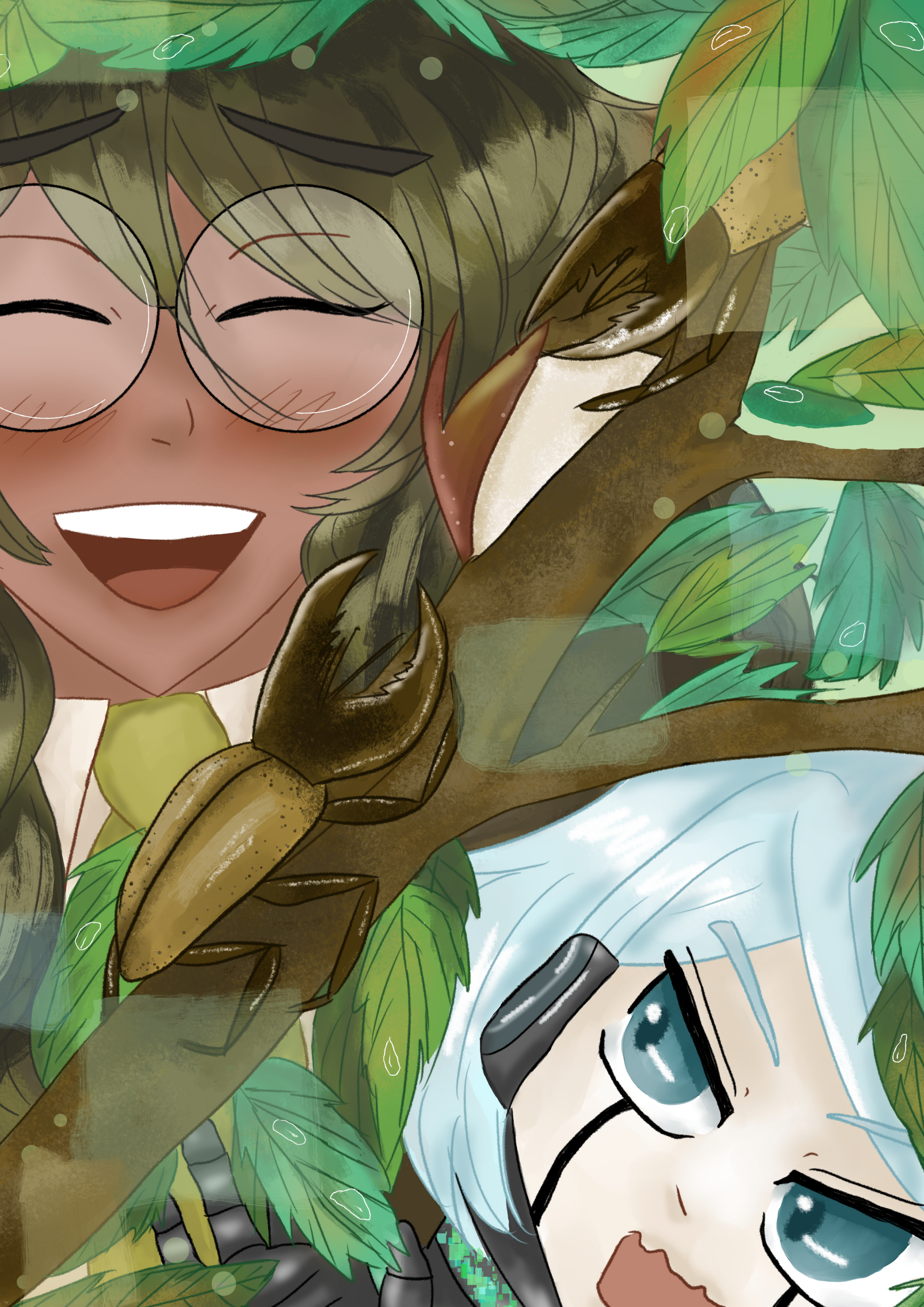


Knocked Flat

by: Wither

In a flash of movement and of a grunt, Hajime found himself once more down on the mat. A knee was digging into the spot in his spine, growing a bruise further under his shirt. With a bit of effort, he kept his face from being mushed into the ground to glance up at the one pinning him down. Unfortunately, the moment was short-lived, as the moment he locked eyes with her, a hand was pressing his head back down onto the mat.

“No, no,” the voice scolded, a teasing smirk clear in her tone. “If you want to get up, you know what to say, Hinata.”

For a moment, Hajime was quiet, wondering how he had gotten into this position, and not even for the first time today. However, the knee digging a bit harder into his back cut off his musings.

“Alright, alright!” Hajime protested before taking in a deep breath and reciting robotically, unable to fully hide the exasperation in his voice. “Natsumi Kuzuryu is the most amazing fighter ever, and I have no chance against her—have mercy, please.”

With that, Natsumi pulled back, preening somewhat. “Damn right I am!”

They took a moment to breathe as Hajime stood back up despite the protest of his legs, while Natsumi brushed off her training gi and took a swig from her water bottle as he mused.

It had been odd for him to see her in such a plain—toughstill heavily customized—outfit at first. He had since found the outfit fit her quite well, even if it was a departure from the corsets and acid-washed jackets she usually wore outside of class.

The gi he wore was drenched in sweat as he took a swig from his own water bottle. He silently conceded to Natsumi that changing into the gi had been a good idea. Though the memory of how easily she could pin him in street clothes—when he had questioned seeing the usually more fashion-forward Natsumi in something like a gi—certainly didn't make him want to give her another reason to gloat

It was clear to anyone watching—let alone anyone actively participating like Hajime—that Natsumi could probably beat him with her eyes closed. Even if she insisted she wouldn't make her so-called training dummy bleed, Hajime's weakness was such that it would just look bad on her to bully him on the mat. She'd spent her whole life being trained for a far more intense kind of life than Hajime could even imagine, and he now had his bruises to prove it.

Still, that only raised the question Hajime had been pondering for what felt like hours. Why did she want him of all people to train with her? He couldn't even get out of a misunderstanding with a security guard without ending up with a bruise on his wrist from the tight grip as the guard was dragging him away from where he had planned to meet up with Nanami. She would probably be better off fighting an actual punching bag than him. Still, he couldn't ask her that to her face, he'd never live it down.

Instead, he took another swig of water and looked over toward her. “You know I've never done this before, right? Maybe you could calm down a bit—take ten seconds to pin me instead of three?”

Her laugh at that was sharp, a bit mean in the way Natsumi always was, but there was something else mixed in it that he could never name—something that made it so it never truly felt like she was actually mocking him. “Obviously not, you've got to learn to deal with it, or you'll never make it. Plus, I need to ensure that some weak punk doesn't catch me off guard in the future because I underestimated them.”

Then her laugh turned a bit sharper, a smug look appearing on her face at his disheveled appearance. “Besides, it's funny to see you unable to say no to me.” Before Hajime could respond, she was snapping orders: “Now back on the mat!”

Placing down his water bottle, Hajime stretched a bit before reluctantly following her lead. He tried not to think too hard about her mocking. Yeah, maybe he should say no more, but it was nice to see her outside of class, where she smiled for real.

“A punk?” he questioned, “I wouldn't call myself all that much of a punk, it's not like I like causing problems.”

With a scoff, Hajime was knocked back to the ground, a foot pinning his bruised wrist from that overeager guard. “Oh? First I've heard of you not causing problems. I assume you just got this from falling down the stairs, then?”

Hajime’s eyes widened as he took in the image of Natsumi towering over him, eyes narrowed with an intensity focused solely on him. All his protests of it not being that bad, or that it wasn't what it looked like, died on his tongue. “How did you...?” he asked instead, trying to steady himself.

With a toss of her hair, Natsumi's glare only grew sharper, more piercing. “You think I wouldn't notice that my favorite bag holder is trying to hold everything in one hand? Of course, I noticed something was up the moment you started making sure I was only on your left side.”

Despite the sharpness of her tone and pointed words, Hajime actually felt a bit lighter as he spoke. She had noticed, and he didn't have to hide it from her. It felt nice knowing she'd been paying attention, that he could relax a bit trying to hide the bruises he had gotten from the overeager responses of Hope's Peak's guards—for the moment.

“It's campus security, you know how they get. It's mostly just been misunderstandings,” he told her, and he meant it. He never intended to be in the main campus areas; Nanami just forgot where he could go, and he didn't remind her so as not to worry her.

It didn't seem to impress Natsumi, though, as she raised an eyebrow, almost mocking his statement. “Quite a lot of misunderstandings for someone proclaiming not to be a punk.”

Starting to get a bit embarrassed at how she saw through him, and not wanting to think about how eager the security could be about wrangling reserves, he sniped some words back as a distraction. “If you knew I was injured, why drag me into this?”

With a roll of her eyes, the tension dissipated somewhat as she stepped off him, letting him go without a fuss this time. When Hajime stood back up, she flicked him on the forehead. “Think, idiot—when you're injured is when you need to know how to fight the most. If you're only knocked down, you're lucky, and you won't get lucky twice. So you need to make sure you don't rely on luck twice. It's just basic common sense, obviously.” She glared. “I can't believe you were getting into fights without even knowing something like that.”

Taken aback, Hajime stared at her for a moment, unsure what to think of her having an actual reason. He couldn't find a flaw with her logic beyond being a bit cynical, and, in a weird way, he felt touched. The set of her jaw and the blaze in her eyes weren't just directed at him— they were for him, and Hajime wasn't sure what to make of it. That he had made her take this seriously, that it did have a meaning for Natsumi he couldn't fully understand. It felt foreign, but it also sent a surge of energy through him, chasing away his earlier weariness.

Shifting back into the basic stance, Hajime refused to give up before it even started, no longer resigned to being tossed around while dragging his feet and pitying himself. He moved, remembering how Natsumi had knocked him down each time before, and he focused on the techniques she had taught.

This time, he got in closer, standing his ground, not letting his guard down or giving up. He powered through the blow and actually struck her.

It was silent, and he froze as the reality of hitting someone hard sank in. He wasn’t sure what to do now, as he'd never hit anyone like that before.

He'd never tried to hit anyone, really. He didn't know if she was okay, if he had done it wrong and accidentally hurt her.

Unconsciously, he shifted his feet as he shot her a worried look, uneasy at the thought. "Hey, I didn't hit you too hard, right?"

The moment of uncertainty quickly proved to be a mistake. The moment he shifted his weight, a foot caught his ankle, sending him tumbling right back to where he started. The ground.

With a foot once again pinning him down, though a bit more lightly this time, Hajime couldn't stop his groan. "Can't even let me have one victory, can you?"

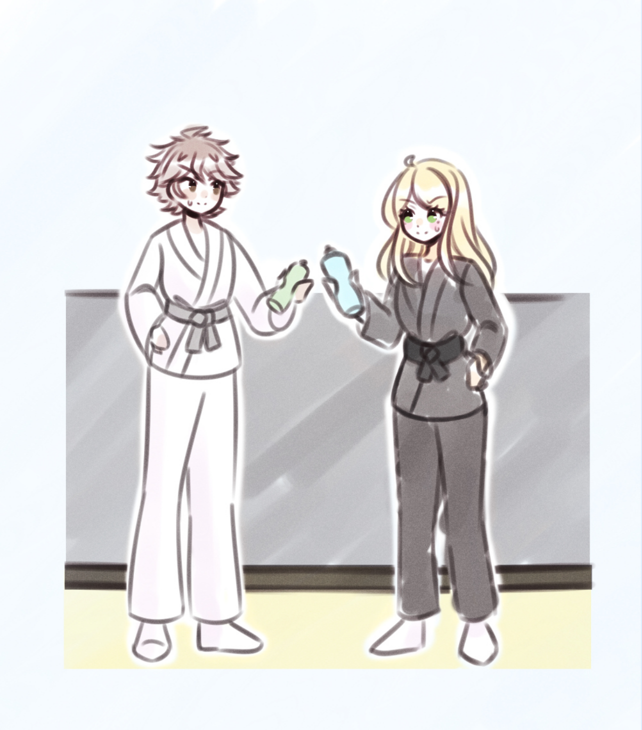
The laugh from Natsumi was warm, if still a bit prickly, like the summer sun. "What victory? You just got cocky and got punished. Maybe next time if you remember I'm not some porcelain maiden that gets knocked out in seconds like you, I'll let you pretend for a moment you got one over on me."

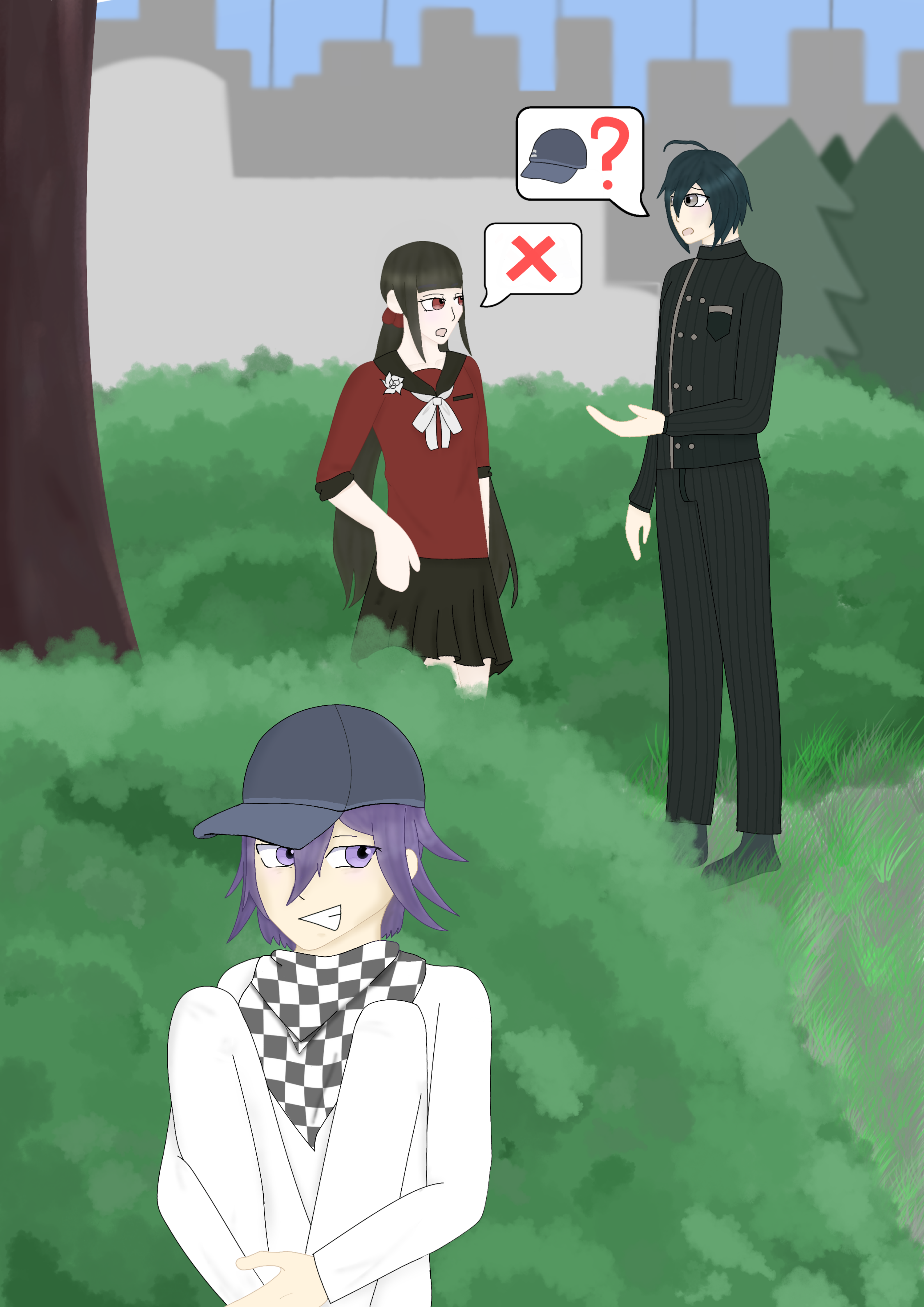
Cutting him off once again, Natsumi crossed her arms, a somewhat evil look to her face. "However, now that you've finally stopped lazing around, I can finally stop my warm-up and get to the actual sparring."

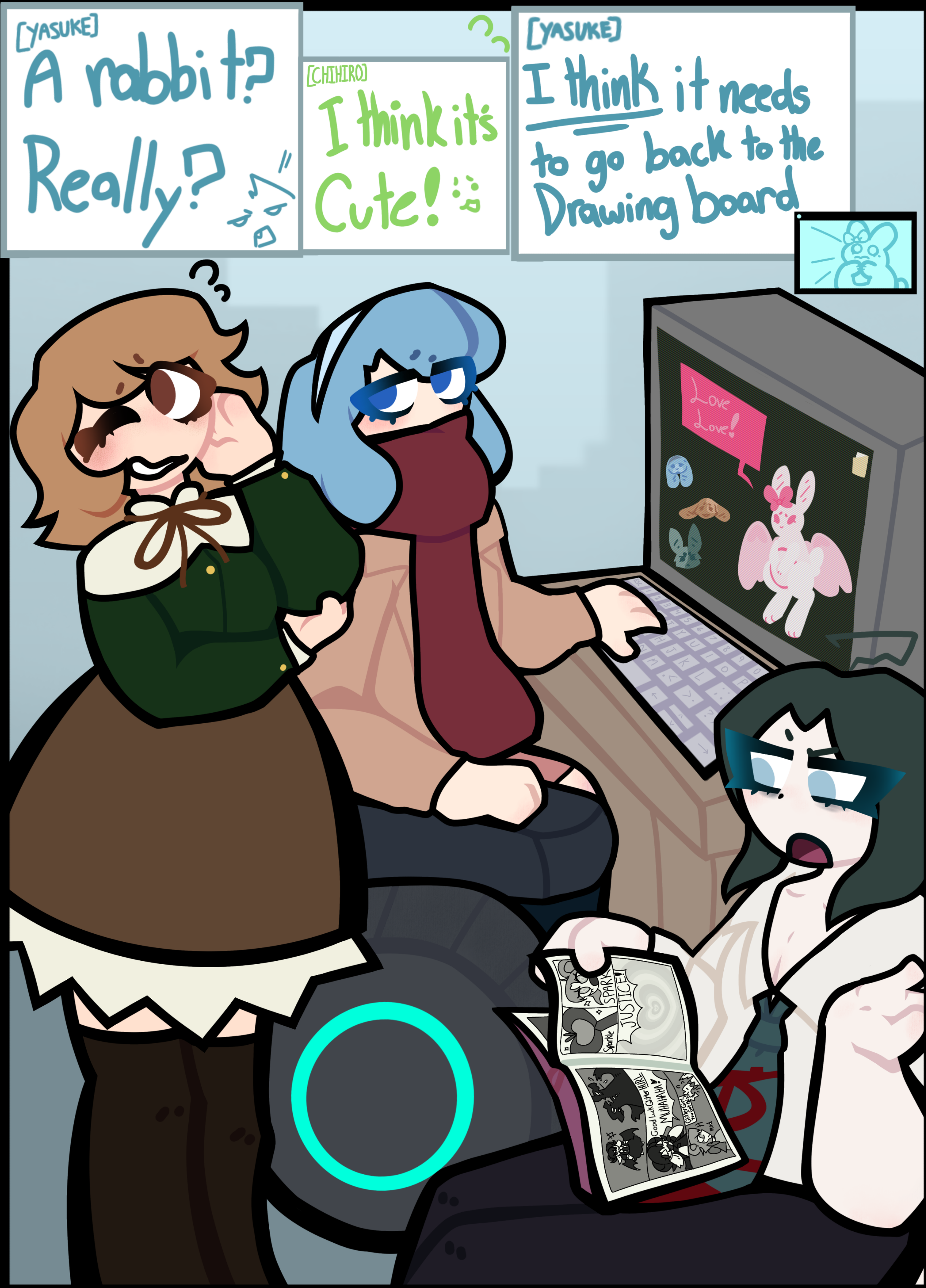
The silence was deafening as Hajime paled at the thought that this had only been a warm-up. "That's not funny, Natsumi."

Her grin only grew more devilish. "Who said I was joking?"

With dread, Hajime realized this was going to be one long afternoon. Even so, he couldn't find it in himself to actually be upset or complain. Not when he understood Natsumi just a little bit more than he had the day before. Not when he got a chance to see a side of her he'd never seen before. Instead, when the foot was removed, he just stood back up and readied himself for another shot.






[YASUKE]
A rabbit? Really?
[CHIHIRO]
I think it's Cute!
[YASUKE]
I think it needs to go back to the Drawing board
Love Love!
SPARK
JUSTICE!
Sparkle
Good Luck Glitter Girl! HURL
MUHAHAHA!
Glitter Girl! You Got this!
nod

TOKI

Development Diary:

Caelestia v0.9.1

by: Karakuri

Chihiro watched anxiously over Nanami's shoulder as the loading bar inched across the monitor. Despite knowing that it would take only a handful of seconds using the top-of-the-line specs of the Ultimate Gamer's hardware, it still felt like half an eternity.

Nanami, for her part, was as calm as ever, taking the opportunity to enjoy a deep yawn.

That didn't mean she wasn't taking this playtest seriously. If anything, Chihiro thought, she might even be the more serious of the two of them. By the opening chord of the title screen music, every shred of sleepiness was gone from her eyes, and she was staring at the *Caelestis* logo—now rendered in Hifumi's bright pink *Minky Momo*-inspired pixel art—with intense focus.

"The soundtrack feels familiar even though I've never heard it before," Nanami remarked as she scanned each item on the menu swiftly, hovering her cursor over them to check their mouseover visuals and the alignments of their clickable regions. "Did Kaede record it for you?"

Chihiro nodded. "Yeah, and she also composed it! Kaede is so amazing… She really went above and beyond for this game. I wasn't expecting her to make eleven separate tracks… She said that after I described the game concept to her, with all the different locations you can find and what they mean, she felt really inspired, so…"

Nanami smiled. By this point, she had clicked into the settings menu and was testing all the windowed display sizes one by one. "Did you show her the alpha? I don't know if Kaede has played any Metroidvania games before, but I think she would be good at them. I'm sure she has agile fingers as a pianist, but more importantly… She's the type who gets back up after failing once, or twice, or fifty times, always believing she can make it if she tries again."

"I… I haven't shown anyone else the game," Chihiro admitted, blushing. "It's not ready yet. If I put something out into the world, I want it to bring happiness to everyone, not frustration or disappointment. Ah—but you're different, because you're my co-developer!"

“You’re doing all the real work, Chihiro. I’m just a gamer, not a game developer.” Nanami tilted her head as the player character dropped onto the first map, listening to the smooth change in soundtrack. The piano music softly tinkled in time with the flicker of the pastel-coloured candles in the background, and she nodded in approval. “This is a good first impression. It feels a little more dynamic now than the previous build did.”

“I couldn’t have made it this way without your advice, Nanami! When I talk to you, I realise that I don’t play that many games at all… but I had something I just really wanted to make, and I only found the confidence to try making it because you’re working together with me.”

Nanami picked up one controller after another, testing the movement and combat controls on each one. “You would have made a good game anyway. Everything works well and there’s barely any lag. The last game I playtested… It wasn’t this polished even on release day, and they had to spend months patching it with hotfixes. Those devs would kill to have a custom engine this good.”

Chihiro froze.

“Ah—sorry, that wasn’t funny.” Nanami paused, glancing around awkwardly. Her gaze landed on the controller she was holding. “Um… This controller has adjustable resistance on the triggers, so I think it would be good for the game feel if you could make the right trigger feel more like you’re really pulling a bowstring.”

Chihiro brightened up immediately, eyes sparkling at the suggestion. “Of course! That's such an important detail! You always have great ideas, Nanami. I’m confident in my programming skills, but when it comes to making a game feel right for the player and become the best game it can be, I know I can count on you for advice!”

Nanami fell silent. The character on the screen jumped from an upturned cauldron onto a mossy platform, hacked its way through a mushroom-shaped obstacle, entered the next room, started fighting the enemies there…

Chihiro’s excitement faded into worry. “...Did I say something wrong?”

“...It's a bit scary when people are counting on me,” Nanami admitted. “I feel like I don't really know what to do.”

“Oh—that’s simple!” Chihiro brightened up immediately, hoping that a big smile would help reassure her. “I’m counting on you to do what you’re already doing, so you just have to carry on doing it! Um… only if you want to, of course, no pressure.”

“...Yeah.” Nanami smiled. “I want to.”

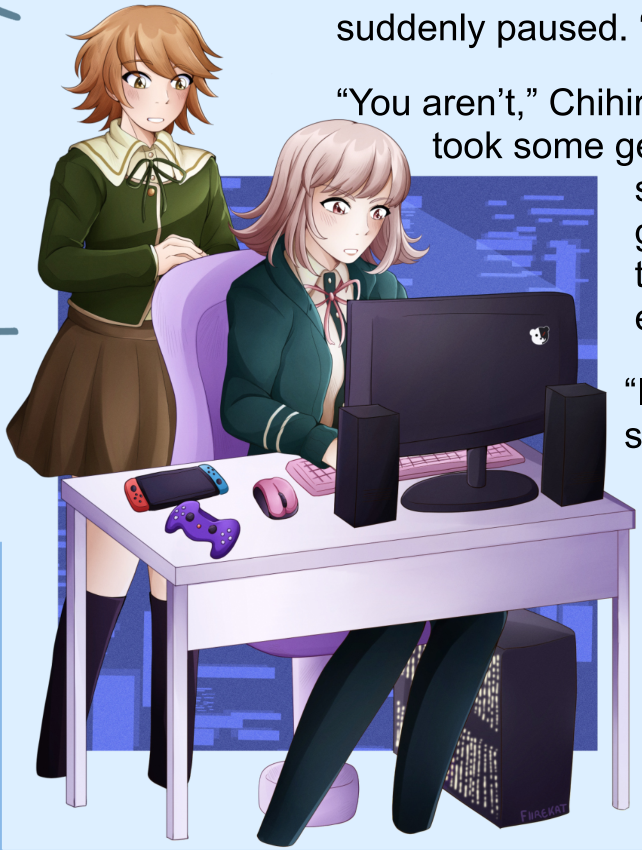
More silence followed, but it felt like a much more relaxed silence. Chihiro breathed a sigh of relief.

The screen darkened as a new area opened up. “This part reminds me of Lavender Town,” Nanami remarked as the soundtrack shifted into an ominous minor key. “Hmm… I know you have a lot of interconnectivity built into the map design, but we’re on the fourth map already, and this is the first time I’m seeing a clear teaser for that, with this treasure chest that we can’t reach yet. It would be better to also have this happen once or twice earlier on, to give the players a better idea of what kind of game this will be and a mystery they can look forward to solving.”

“That makes so much sense!” Chihiro was beaming again, and this time, Nanami smiled too.

The sun was setting by the time they were done with the playtest. Nanami had given quite a number of comments by then—the enemies in the dungeon area were too weak for the atmosphere the game was trying to build; the illusory blocks in the mirage area weren’t being used to their full potential; the distance from the respawn point to the third boss may have been short in theory, but it was long in terms of how much difficult platforming the player needed to succeed at—and Chihiro dutifully wrote them down, one by one, between bites of delivery pizza.

Partway through an excited little lecture on how the history of dashes ought to influence the dash implementation in *Caelestis*, Nanami suddenly paused. “Maybe I’m being too picky. Or too harsh.”



“You aren’t,” Chihiro replied, without hesitation. “It’s true that it took some getting used to before I knew what to do when someone criticised my work… but I know it's good for everyone if I listen to feedback and try to make the project better, and that's enough for me.”

“I'm glad to hear that,” Nanami said with a soft smile.

They continued working through the feedback list together. This time, Nanami slowed down a little, making sure to weave positive comments in with the suggestions and then smiling when Chihiro blushed with joy.

“The most unique part of the game is the boss battles, and I think it's also the best part.” Nanami brought the sprite for the first boss back on screen for illustration. “At the same time, it's something players will need some preparation to get used to. I also had trouble with it at first, remember? Most boss battles feel like you’re fighting a collection of hard numbers with specified patterns, and you just need the stats, knowledge, and muscle memory to beat them. But this… it felt like a silent dialogue between you and the boss because of how its behaviour responds to your playstyle and tries to counter it. When you're marketing the game, I think you should put this information front and center so that players are prepared to do more thinking and adapting.”

“You don't think it'll be too difficult and complicated? I don't want the players to be disappointed because it isn't what they were expecting—”

“No, it's the best part of the game, and you should leave it in.” Nanami turned to face Chihiro with a steady gaze. “I know you started out by developing conversational AI, but here, you've managed to create a sense of responsive dialogue completely nonverbally. Like with this mentor figure boss… she’s almost impossible to fight using her techniques alone, but if you ignore her lessons and try something new, she becomes more and more set in her ways and can even start acting punitively. There’s no hard cue to trigger that change in behaviour like in most boss battles that have different phases, so it feels very organic. It lets you show your players what it feels like when the stubbornness of the people you respect is a barrier you have to overcome. It's a brilliant innovation. The players who understand what you've done here will be very impressed, and the players who don't can learn.”

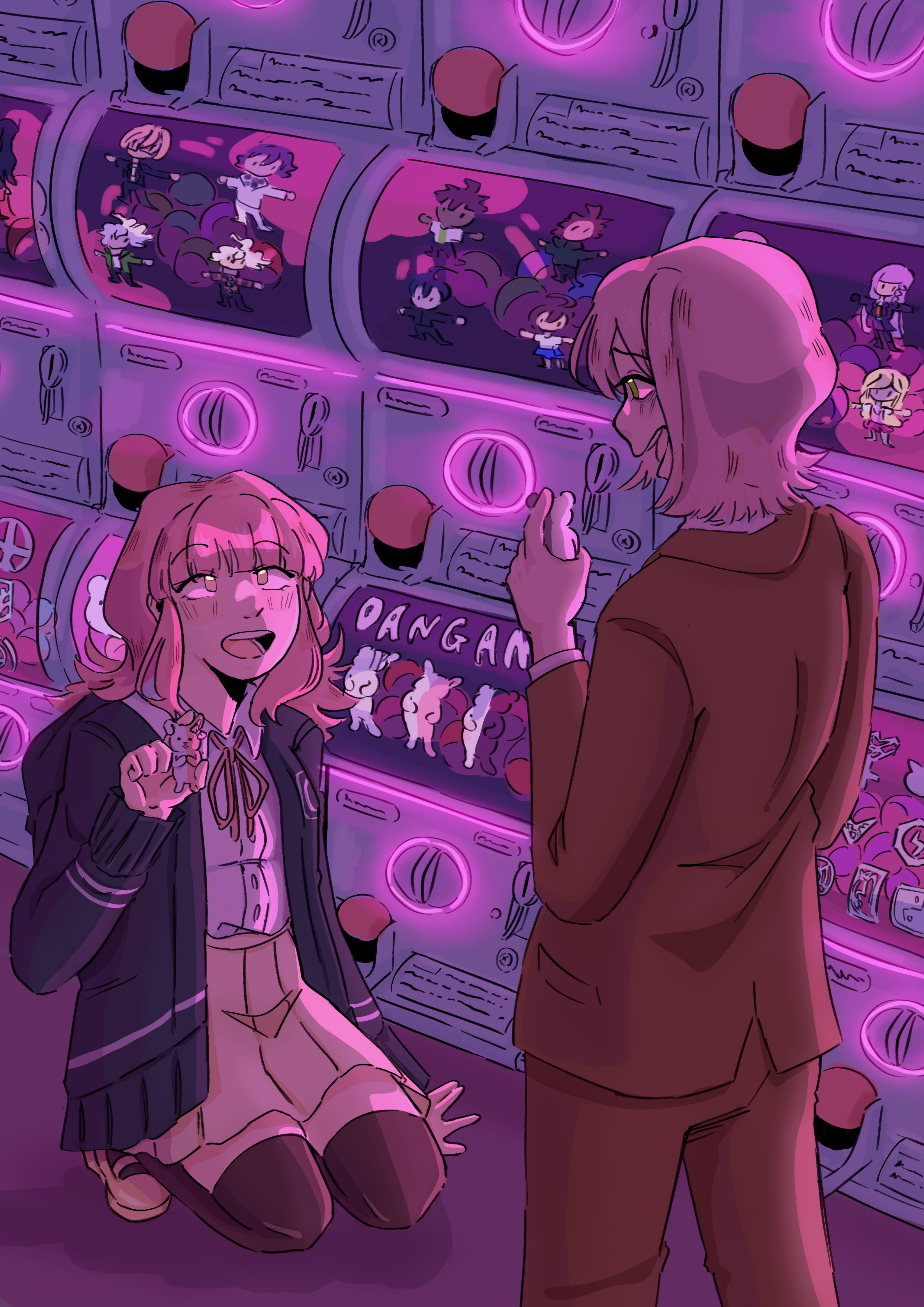
Chihiro nodded, too busy blushing to reply.

“Unless you have other questions, I think… that's everything…” Nanami yawned and rubbed her eyes.

“R-right! Thank you so much for your feedback,” Chihiro said. “Let me treat you to something at the café tomorrow, I heard they’re doing a collab with Sayaka’s idol group… Hello? Nanami?”

The Ultimate Gamer was already asleep, slumped over in her gaming chair and mumbling something about floating eyes and amulets.

Chihiro smiled and reached for the lever to ratchet down the chair back until it was almost level. Hopefully, that would prevent Nanami from waking up with a sore back. For now, it was time for Chihiro to head home and start putting all these suggestions into practice…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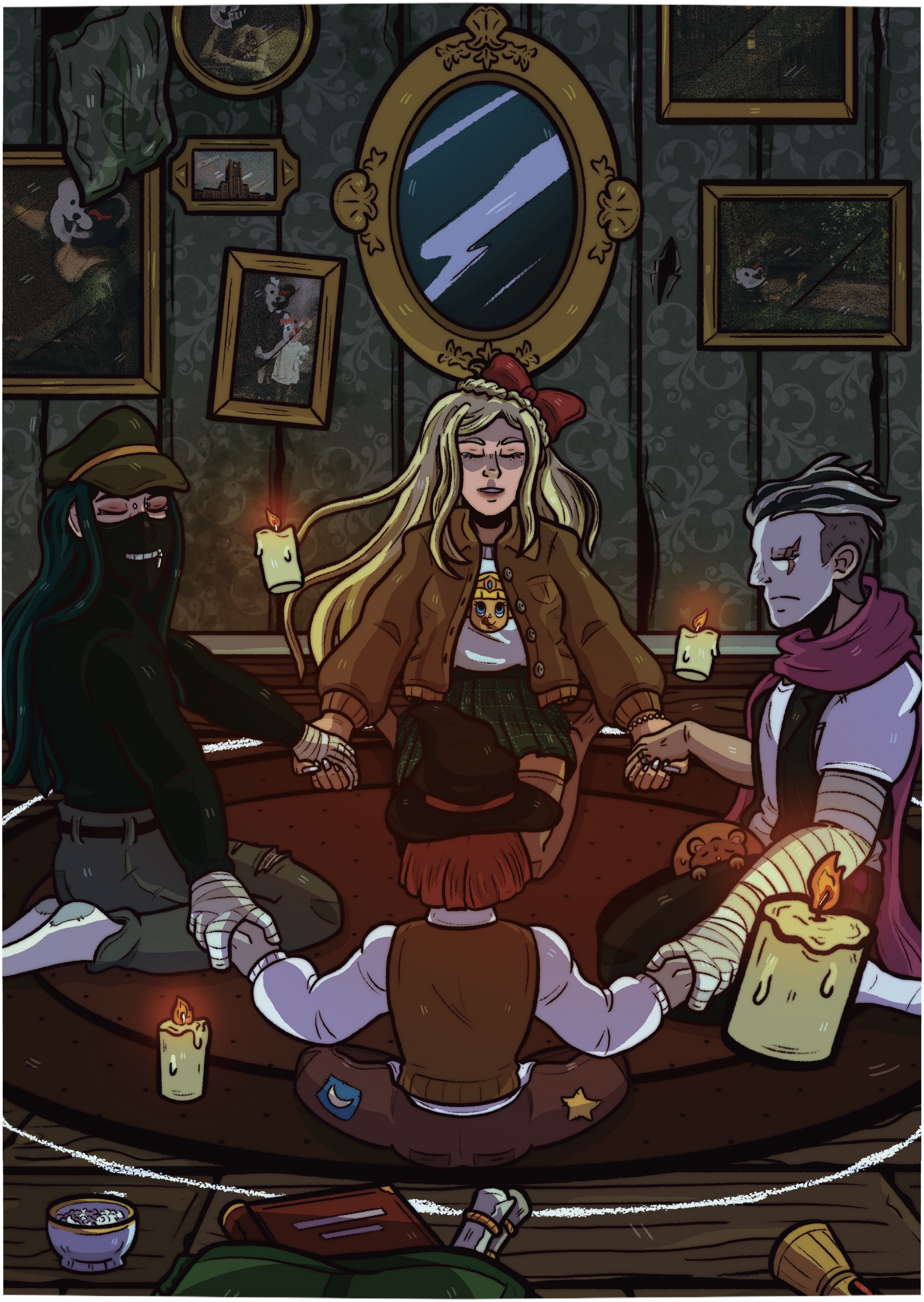
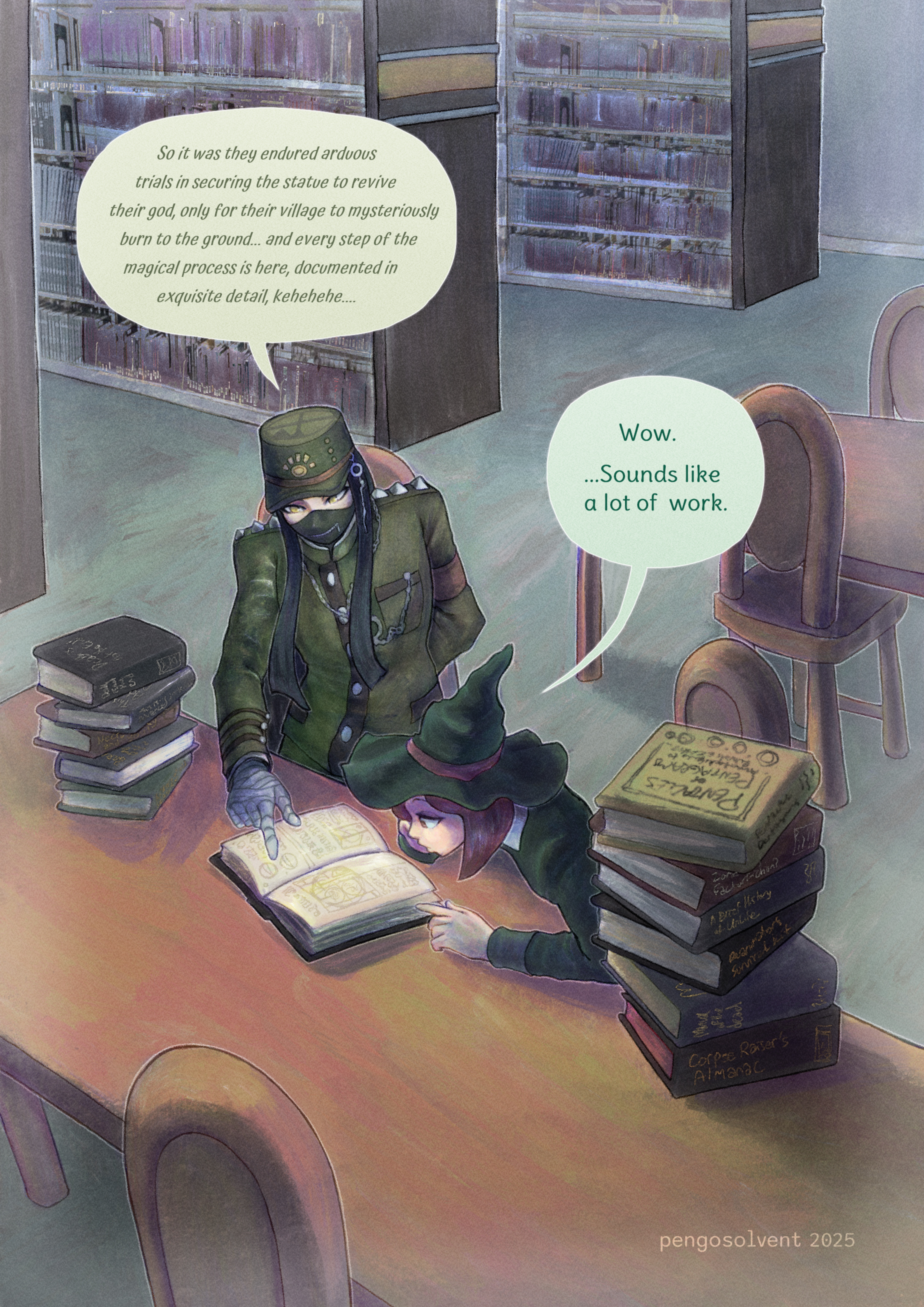
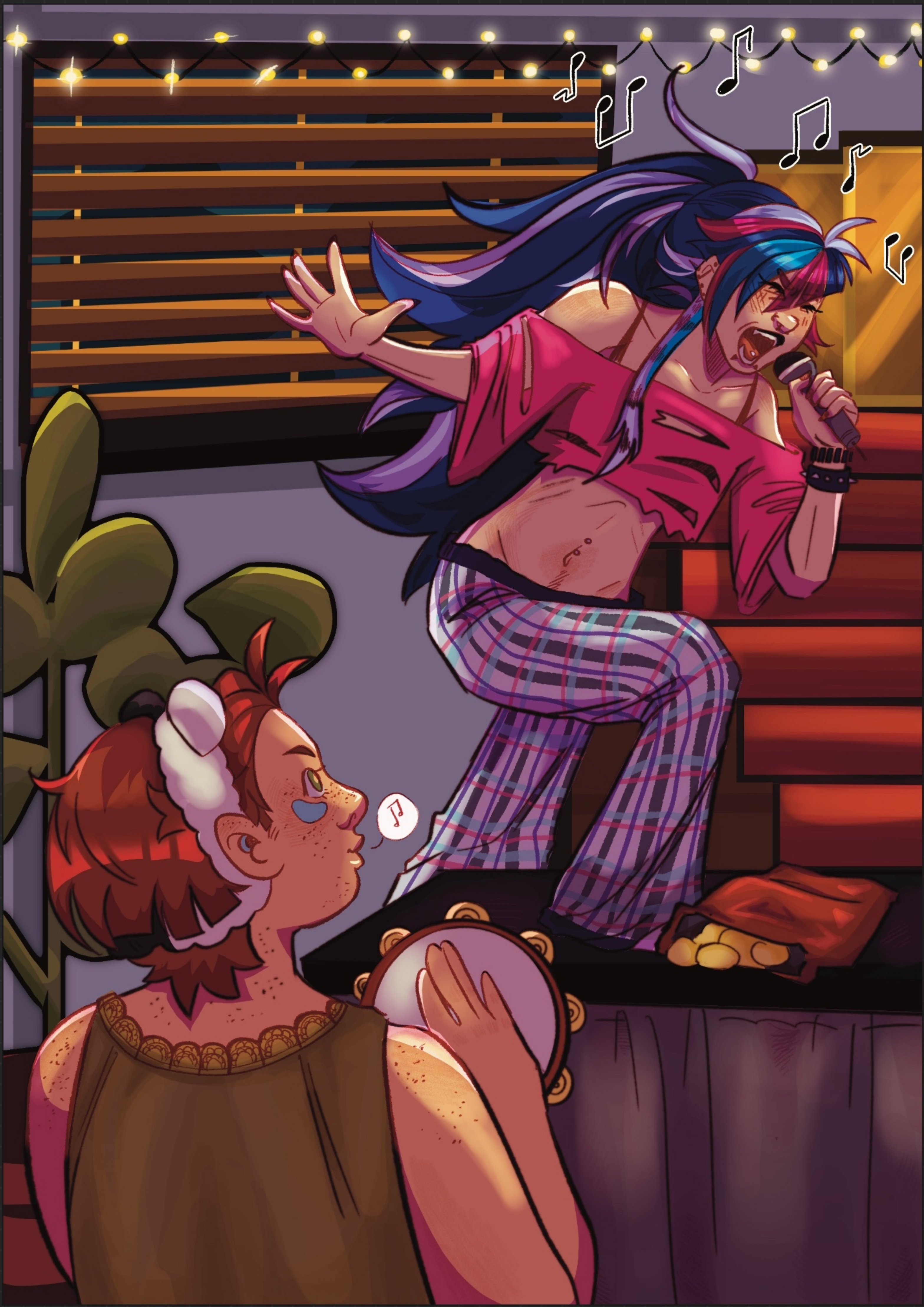



So it was they endured arduous trials in securing the statue to revive their god, only for their village to mysteriously burn to the ground... and every step of the magical process is here, documented in exquisite detail, kehehehe....
Wow.
...Sounds like a lot of work.
Pentacles of Pentagrams
A Brief History of Unlife
Reanimator's Survival Kit
Corpse Raiser's Almanac
pengosolvent 2025



Keeping the Peace

by: Kalcifer

There was something almost meditative, Sakura thought, about gathering her things after class. It was nice to have everything in its place, ready to be used when next she needed them. Satisfying, even. Though, admittedly, her satisfaction may also have had something to do with being done with school for the day.

Whichever it was, there was none of that peace to be found today. Her miniature routine was disrupted by an out-of-place movement in her peripheral vision—one that didn't fit the normal stream of students leaving the classroom.

It took her a second to put her finger on it. Then she realized—two rows up, Mukuro was leaving the classroom, and something about her gait was off. She was as fast as ever, and she'd never allow herself to limp, but there was none of her usual economy of motion. Sakura suspected she was trying to avoid aggravating an injury.

Despite herself, Sakura's first reaction was surprise. It seemed she'd bought into the mystique around the Ultimate Soldier. Mukuro was still human, after all. Of course, she could be hurt.

Maybe Mukuro had forgotten that, too. It would explain why she was so determined to ignore it, even as she risked exacerbating it. Or maybe it was sheer stubbornness—Sakura wasn't in a position to judge her for that.

She was, however, in a position to do something about it. She stood and headed after Mukuro.

She caught up to her right outside the building. Up close, the tension in Mukuro's posture was obvious. "You need to rest," Sakura insisted.

"No, I don't," Mukuro said, not meeting Sakura's eyes. "We've got reports due tomorrow. I need to work on mine."

"I'm not going to waste her time or mine like that." Mukuro's grip on her bag tightened. "So, if that's all you needed..." She shifted her weight, wincing a little as she jarred her ankle.

If Sakura had had more time to think, she probably wouldn't have done it. As it was, she just knew that Mukuro was going to continue hurting herself if Sakura didn't intervene, and so it was her duty to stop her.

She picked Mukuro up.

Mukuro, of course, punched her in the stomach. There was an impressive amount of power behind it, given how little room she had to maneuver. Sakura froze, allowing the pain to wash over her, but she didn't loosen her grip.

She expected Mukuro to keep fighting, but instead, she went still, almost rigid. It was frankly more concerning than the punch had been.

Still, she kept her voice level as she told Mukuro, "I'm taking you to the infirmary. Even if it really is nothing, it's good to have confirmation. Mikan certainly won't mind the practice."

Mukuro tensed. There was a tense second in which she seemed prepared to launch herself from Sakura's arms, but then it passed, and she went limp. "Why do you even care?" she asked. "It's my leg, and my problem."

Sakura carefully adjusted her hold, heading for the infirmary. "You're my friend. I don't want to see you in pain."

"Don't look, then," Mukuro suggested tiredly.

Sakura made a low sound of disapproval, but there wasn't really much she could say to that. They walked in silence for several minutes.

Finally, Sakura spoke again. "Forgive me if I'm overstepping," she began, "but I wanted to ask: I've heard that you made it through your time in Fenrir without being wounded. Is Hope's Peak that much more dangerous?"

Mukuro mumbled something Sakura didn't catch.

"What was that?"

Mukuro sighed. "Junko told me to jump off the roof."

Sakura's next step landed too roughly, and Mukuro winced. "Sorry," Sakura said automatically.

It was, she noted distantly, impressive that Mukuro had come away from such a stunt with only a sprained ankle. Junko must have known that she could.

The thought wasn't a comforting one. Sakura cleared her throat. "...Why?" she asked at last.

"I don't know." Mukuro's tone was defensive, though whether of herself or her sister, Sakura couldn't say. "It's none of my business why she does the things she does."

Sakura fought to keep her own voice level. "I would think it is, if she's involving you like this."

"She knows what she's doing." Mukuro shrugged. "Junko's always been the smart one. If she thinks it's a good idea for me to do something, I know better than to question her."

Sakura had never been close with Junko, but she'd seen the way she teased Makoto for his supposed lack of talent—the way her jokes were just too pointed to claim innocence. "And what if what she's doing is hurting you for fun?"

Mukuro's reply was immediate. "Then at least she's hurting me and not herself."

Sakura had asked, she supposed. She wished she hadn't.

It was too late for regrets. All she could do now was try to make it right. "I suppose I understand that. As much as I've wondered what I might do if I didn't inherit the dojo, I could never do that to my family. The Ogami Clan has shouldered this duty for centuries. Who am I to cast it aside now?"

Mukuro frowned. "That doesn't seem fair."

"You're hardly one to talk," Sakura pointed out.

"No, that's exactly my point. I chose this." Mukuro spoke slowly, as if she was trying to articulate something so basic she'd never had to put it into words. "I'll always be Junko's twin, but being her accomplice is my choice. That's why it means anything. But you never had a choice about inheriting the dojo. They just decided that for you."

"I wouldn't go that far," Sakura said mildly. "Yes, I had expectations placed upon me. But I'm the one who chose to come to Hope's Peak. I'm the one who's fighting to become worthy of the trust they place in me."

"As opposed to what? Letting everyone down?"

The jab was well-aimed, and Sakura found herself responding in kind. "And what about you? What would have happened if you had refused to jump?"

Mukuro didn't respond. Sakura wondered if she was thinking, like Sakura was, about the fine line between love and duty. What did it mean to be strong if you could only use that strength at the behest of others? Did it matter if the one giving the orders had your best interests at heart?

If there were answers to be found, the walk to the infirmary wasn't long enough to reach them.

"We're here," Sakura said—part realization, part announcement.

She began to crouch, only for Mukuro to hop out of her arms. Mukuro nearly managed to hide her wince at the way the movement jostled her ankle.

"Thanks." She turned back down the hallway.

Sakura raised an eyebrow.

Mukuro rolled her eyes and walked into the infirmary.

Sakura left her to it. Whatever she chose to tell Mikan was her business; Sakura had already pried enough.

Mukuro showed up to class the next day on crutches, her sister cackling away. Sakura wished her expression weren’t so familiar. It was the same as yesterday's—an almost successful attempt to mask pain.

Sakura decided then to keep a closer eye on Mukuro. It was clear that she could use a friend of her own. Who knew? Maybe she could even help Sakura sort through some of her own obligations.

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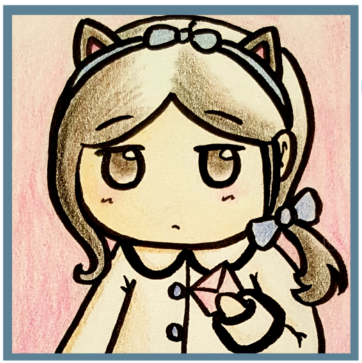

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pg. 17

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Page Artist

Mackerells
pg. 19

@Mackerells

Page Artist

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pg. 20

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Page Artist

Mezzanottte
pg. 21

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